

A Remarkable Fact in Natural History.

The following communication from an old paper, the *American Turf Register*, was handed us by John F. Wilson, Esq. He obtained it from Esq. Wm. Jewell, of Cap-au-Gris, who has tried the experiment referred to, and his experience confirms the truth of the statement. It is a curious fact and one which we presume most of our readers would rather see before they believe.

KASKASKIA, Ill., July 30, 1833.
Mr. Editor:—I have noticed but one communication in your useful Magazine of which the turkey buzzard of our country was the subject; and that is by Don Juan, in the fourth number of your first volume. That bird is certainly the most useful we have; and its preservation, in some of the western states, is protected by legislative enactments. But I am not writing with a view to amplify its merits, but to state a remarkable fact in regard to it, which, though well authenticated, will doubtless stagger the credulity of most of your readers.

Major John Pillers, a farmer of great respectability in this county, informed me that while he lived at his father's, in Missouri, some twenty years ago, a buzzard was taken alive, having gorged itself over a carcass to such a degree as to prevent its flying—its weight being too heavy for its wings; when he, together with his father, brother, and a neighbor, with a small shoemaker's awl, ripped open its eyes so that no part of the ball of either remained. The head of the bird was then put under one of its wings; in which position it remained a few moments, when to the surprise of all, he gradually relieved his head from his wing and shook himself as if to arrange his disordered feathers, and reappeared with two good sound eyes, free from blemish, and possessing in every degree the power of vision! This seemingly cruel experiment was repeated with the same bird on different occasions in the presence of various persons fifty times, and always with the same result; not the least injury appeared to have been occasioned by it. After the lapse of a few months the bird flew away to its accustomed haunts.

I have mentioned this fact to several persons—practical, uneducated men—who, although they had never seen the like, expressed no doubt of its truth, but replied that they always had heard that the down from the inside of a buzzard's wing was a cure for blindness in horses; and one man remarked that he had cured a most inveterate case of approaching blindness in himself by it. He procured the down, spread it on bandage, applied it, and recovered.

In corroboration of the statement of Major Pillers—whose deposition is hereto subjoined—I can state my own experience on this subject. Traveling, some three years since, in the American Bottom, I stayed part of a day with a friend of mine whose stepson had the day before taken a half-grown buzzard, disabled from flying by over-eating. As soon as I saw the bird the above statement of Major Pillers came fresh to my recollection, and, as I had always been incredulous, I was determined to put it to the test of experience, and accordingly mentioned the fact to the young gentleman who had the bird, and desired him to operate upon it. Having no sharp-pointed instrument other than a pin, he with that punctured one of the eyes, the aqueous humor flowed out and a whiteness like film came over the eye, all its lustre instantly disappearing. The head was then put under the wing of the bird, where it remained but a few minutes only, and when taken out the eye had resumed its usual brilliancy, appearing as sound as the other, with not a speck upon it. In this experiment, it is true, the eye-ball was not ripped open—that operation seeming too cruel to have my participation—but, as far as it goes, it serves to inspire belief in the statement made by Major Pillers.

And why should there not be a healing virtue in the down of a buzzard's wing. No man can say why not! Do we know whence those animal, mineral and vegetable substances, resorted to for the cure of all

maladies, derive healing powers? The fact that certain substances possess such qualities has been ascertained by experiment; and, until that infallible test has disproved the efficacy of this down, no one can say that it will not cure blindness. And why should not the buzzard have powers to reproduce its eyes? There are many mysteries in nature which we shall never be able to fathom. It is a mystery that an acorn can develop itself and become an oak; that an unrightly worm can, in a short time become a most beautiful fly; in short, the whole world is but an open volume of mysteries which all can wonder at, but few can unravel. It is true too, that

"There are more things in heaven and earth than have been dreamt of in our philosophy."

We know that many insects and reptiles have the power of casting their old skin every year, and appearing in an entirely new one; that the common house spider gets a new skin and a new set of legs every year, and that if you pull off one of its legs, it will in two or three days have a new one in its place. The shedding of the teeth and reproduction of the nails, in the human species, are certainly remarkable, and would be so considered, were they not of daily occurrence. Upon sober consideration, it cannot be regarded more wonderful that a buzzard should have the power to reproduce its eyes than a spider its skin and legs; a horse teeth and hoofs; or a species their teeth and nails; or a deer his antlers. They are all remarkable phenomena of animal physiology; and, as they cannot be accounted for on any known principles, we must, with our present limited knowledge of nature and her mysterious operations, be content to know the existence of the facts alone. The fact stated in the copulation of the deposition, relative to the bald eagle, has not, I venture to say, arrested the attention of any one. Who would believe that the feathers of that bird cannot be plucked out? The ideas of feathers and plucking are ever associated; yet you cannot get those of the bald eagle without taking the skin with them; unless, perhaps, through the agency of some chemical preparation of which we, far west in the back-woods, know nothing.

DEPOSITION OF MAJOR JOHN PILLERS.

I, John Pillers, a citizen of Randolph county, Illinois, do depose and say, that I am the individual alluded to in the above communication, and that the facts stated therein, so far as I am concerned, are true in every particular. The experiment of ripping open the buzzard's eyes, during the time we kept it, from February until May, was repeated I dare say fifty times; and once, at a log-rolling, ten times in one day. An old negro, belonging to Mr. Francis Valle, Sen., of St. Genevieve, named Joseph, then supposed to be upwards of one hundred years old—first told me of it, and I have tried it frequently since, on different buzzards, and always with the same result.

The same negro told me that the feathers could not be plucked out of a bald eagle. This is true. You may try it in any way, and scald it, and you cannot pull out a feather.

JOHN PILLERS.
Sworn to and subscribed before me, a Justice of the Peace of Randolph county, this 6th day of August, 1833; and I do further certify that John Pillers, the subscriber to the above, is well known to me as a gentleman of character and respectability.

JAMES HUGHES, J. P.

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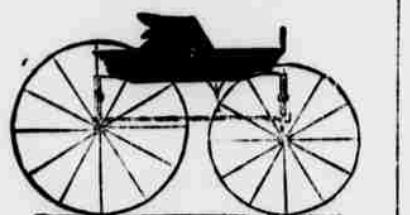
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